

READING NEW WORDS IN CONTEXT

Lesson 6 **CONTEXT: The People**

The passage gives you an opportunity to expand your vocabulary. Below are twenty Vocabulary Words that are used in the passage and in the exercises that follow it.

adamant	beneficent	frustrate	repugnant
ambivalent	betrothed	interminable	resilient
antagonize	congenital	intrepid	sallow
archives	consensus	peremptory	sortie
autocrat	factionous	procrastinate	supplication

The Pilgrims: Surviving "The Starving Time"

North America was a rude awakening for the Puritan Pilgrims. After sailing from England aboard the *Mayflower* in 1620, they encountered a harsh and dangerous land. Their first year was especially discouraging, filled with hardships, disease, and death. These setbacks would have been enough to **frustrate** (1) even the most determined colonists. William Bradford (1590–1657), in his history, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, refers to the experience as "the starving time." Yet these devout Puritans believed in the generosity and goodness of their god. They relied completely on God's **beneficence** (2). Through their prayers of **supplication** (3), they received the guidance and strength that they asked for.

The Puritan Faith

The Puritans were a Protestant sect that tried to reform the traditional and ritualized Church of England. The Puritans believed that grace from God was not **congenital** (4). People were not born with grace but achieved it through a lifetime of good work. They believed in a more personal relationship with their god, one between the individual worshiper and his or her god. They felt that the

Church of England was too **peremptory** (5), arrogant, and dictatorial. The Puritans tried to create a more democratic community, where decisions were made by **consensus** (6) rather than by one person. In the Puritan church, all the worshipers had some input in the religious service. The Church of England, on the other hand, was run in a much more **autocratic** (7) way: only church officials made decisions. The criticism the Puritans experienced was often fierce, but they remained **adamant** (8), yielding not an inch in their faith. As a result of persecution, the Pilgrims eventually sought religious freedom in the New World. Calling themselves Pilgrims, a group of more than one hundred set off in the *Mayflower* for the colony of Virginia. They landed instead on the coast of what is now Massachusetts on November 11, 1620.

The coast's stark sand dunes must have been a disappointment to the travelers. With winter approaching, the Pilgrims decided there could be no **procrastination** (9) in settling there—housing and shelter were built immediately. Even the most **intrepid** (10), or courageous, of the colonists probably had mixed, changing, or **ambivalent** (11) feelings about their new home. All the Pilgrims

remained committed and united, however; there were no **factionous** (12) members who quarreled or refused to do their share of the work.

Colonial Life

From William Bradford's writings, one gets a vivid impression of the colony's early months. Bradford records that half the colonists died within three months. The winter was harsh, made more difficult by the lack of proper supplies and shelter. The cold weather lasted so long that it seemed **interminable** (13). Scurvy and other diseases proved fatal to many colonists and the lack of food left others looking sickly, pale, and **sallow** (14). The few healthy colonists willingly took care of the sick and tended to even the most **repugnant** (15) of chores that those with queasy stomachs would find disgusting. The Pilgrims were **resilient** (16), however, and were able to bounce back after the long winter. They were fortunate, too, in being befriended by Squanto (1585?-1622), one of a few surviving members of the Patuxet tribe. He helped the colonists make peace with the local Wampanoag tribe, whom the Pilgrims had **antagonized** (17) during the winter by taking and eating some of their grain. Squanto mediated between the angry Wampanoag and the starving Pilgrims, and he later taught the Pilgrims how to plant and harvest crops of their own. The result of this harvest was, of course, the famous first Thanksgiving in the autumn of 1621.

Documents of Early Colonial Life and Legend

Many scholars agree that William Bradford's firsthand look at Pilgrim life is one of the most important documents in early American history. Bradford began writing his history of Plymouth Colony in 1630. Until 1647, he wrote annual accounts of the settlement. The Plymouth church's records contained the first nine chapters of Bradford's history. The church doubled as **archives** (18), serving as a place for the storage and preservation of such important historical material. The original manuscript was lost during the Revolutionary War, perhaps during a military **sortie** (19), or defensive attack. In any event, historians believe the manuscript was picked up as a souvenir by a British soldier and carried back to England where it was discovered in 1855 and published the following year.

William Bradford was dedicated not only to recording the history of the New World but also to making history. He was elected thirty times to lead the Pilgrim community. His assistant governor was John Alden (1599-1687). The story of how Alden became **betrothed** (20) and later married to Priscilla Mullens (1602?-1685?) is famous, thanks to the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem "The Courtship of Miles Standish." Clearly, Bradford's records were crucial to the documentation of early American history and were the basis for some famous American legends.

EXERCISE 1

Finding Synonyms

Directions. Reread the preceding passage. Then write on the line provided a synonym for each of the words in boldface. If you cannot think of an exact synonym, you may write a brief definition of the word.

1. frustrate _____
2. beneficence _____
3. supplication _____
4. congenital _____

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

5. peremptory
6. consensus
7. autocratic
8. adamant
9. procrastination
10. intrepid
11. ambivalent
12. factious
13. interminable
14. sallow
15. repugnant
16. resilient
17. antagonized
18. archives
19. sortie
20. betrothed